

## MASTER'S THESIS

### [L]/[n] alternation in Hong Kong English

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**[l]/[n] ALTERNATION  
IN HONG KONG ENGLISH**

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*MA in Language Studies*

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## Abstract

This study attempts to investigate [l]/[n] alternation in Hong Kong English (HKE). 10 native Cantonese speaking educated adults who received their primary and secondary education in Hong Kong were selected as the informants of the present study.

A word list was created to include all the possibilities of the segmental features for 'l' and 'n' words. The informants were asked to recall the English words after a preparation session. Their voice was recorded and analysed. The informants were also asked to perform a recognition test to identify their ability in differentiating the two phonemes, /l/ and /n/, in the syllable onset position.

The pattern of [l]/[n] alternation is described in its own term. A comparison with the [l]/[n] alternation pattern in the Modern Hong Kong Cantonese (MHKC) is provided in the light of exploration of crosslinguistic influence (CLI) of the native language (NL).

The findings show that not all HKE speakers can differentiate the two sounds. [l]/[n] alternation differs substantially among HKE speakers and the frequency of alternation correlates inversely with the language proficiency of the speakers. There are some overall patterns of the alternation. Firstly, it is limited to syllable onset and consonant cluster of 'n'. Secondly, the presence of another 'l' or 'n', distance between another 'n' and the original 'l' and the position of 'l' in polysyllabic word are found to be significant in inhibiting 'l'→[n] alternation. Finally, it is observed that the influence of MHKC is not sufficient to account for the [l]/[n] alternation pattern found in HKE.

## 摘要

本論文旨在探討「香港英語」(HKE) 中 [l]/[n] 之轉換模式。是項研究選取了十名以粵語為母語的成年人作發音人，他們均是曾在香港接受小學及中學教育的知識份子。

本文根據所有與 'l' 和 'n' 關連的音段特點整理出一份字詞測試清單。測試過程中，我們先給予研究對象一段研讀時間，才要求他們按指示唸出對應的英文字詞。他們的讀音會被收錄再作分析。為了鑑定研究對象分辨 /l/ 及 /n/ 兩個音素的能力，他們需再接受一項辨識能力之測試。

本文就「香港英語」[l]/[n] 之轉換模式作出自身為本之分析，並嘗試探析「現代香港粵語」(MHKC) 作為本土語對「香港英語」(目的語) 所產生的「跨語言影響」(CLI)。

研究結果發現，並非所有「香港英語」發音人皆能清晰分辨出 [l]、[n] 之差異，而香港人在說英語時其 [l]/[n] 轉換模式上亦存在顯著差異，其轉換頻率則與其語言能力成反比。雖然如此，整體上仍可辨析出一定轉換模式，但該模式僅限於起始音節及含 'n' 子音群中的字詞上出現。至於阻礙 'l' → [n] 轉換之因素則有三點：1. 另一個 'l' 或 'n' 的存在；2. 'l' 與 'n' 的距離；3. 在多音節字詞中 'l' 音節的位置。研究亦顯示出「跨語言影響」並未能充份解釋到「香港英語」中 [l]/[n] 之轉換模式。

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